THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

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We might call this our 'interim issue'. It is a little too early to tabulate the results of our recent questions, although trends are becoming apparent. We did not wish to wait another few weeks for more results as that would have made the newsletter very late. Hence the 'interim issue'.

DID YOU KNOW ...that the term 'ragtime' originally referred to the chitterling parties given by the Southern Negroes before the turn of the century ? To advertise these parties it became a custom to display a white flag in front of the establishment housing the bash. A piano player was always present to entertain patrons. The expression, "where's the rag tonight" could be heard on street corners in the coloured sections of town. Eventually the term " rag " became associated with the style of playing employed by the pianists who earned a living playing at these parties....according to Floyd Levin writing in the February 1950 'Jazz Journal'.

PERFORMERS and PLACES.

Toronto's Club 76, having recently changed ownership, is rumoured to have re-engaged Bob Darch, who we understand is due back around the end of April. We hope to be able to confirm this in our next newsletter. Visible changes in the Club's decor would seem to indicate a swing to sing-along types of entertainment, and away from the ragtime emporium of the past 5 years.

We heard recently from Karl Leaf who is following the trend to ragtime, and still holding forth in Shakey's, Ventura, California. Karl is tackling some of the tougher classics, and has added Lamb's "Excelsior Rag" to his repertoire.

Dave Pope tells us that WALLY ROSE continues to hold court at the Gold Coast in San Francisco, and of course we hear from Wally too from time to time. Wally has told a good number of ragtimers about our activities, and so the word gets around. Dave Pope says that Wally is almost the antithesis of ragtime in appearance, is a fine chap, a polite listener, and enjoys talking on all aspects of ragtime. Despite the demands of the crowd, Wally will play a rag or two every time. As with every popular performer, the best nights to hear your requests are the off nights...Monday to Thursday.

We recently had a short note from Bob Durst, but he didn't tell us where he was playing. When last heard in Montreal a couple of years ago, Durst was mainly a sing-along type, although, depending on the mood of the crowd, he would occasionally belt out 'Tickle The Ivories' and a few other rags.

Mitchell Brown of Lawrence, Kansas tells us that his piano teacher is an original ragtime player, having worked years ago in a music store in Ottawa, (Kansas) playing whatever sheet music the customers brought her. She said that she once played a piece for Blind Boone who then sat down and played it back exactly as she had played it.

Lorne McEachnie of Toronto drew our attention to the fact that all modern machinery must have a screw driver taken to them from time to time to make adjustments. He requested that we make the necessary adjustments to his address stencil with said screwdriver. We had the stencils made elsewhere and if others of you got incorrect addresses, please return the envelope and show the necessary correction.

PLAYER PIANO ROLLS.

We have many requests from time to time for information on rolls. Most of the requests come from new names who have been referred to us by others. As those of you who have been with us for some time know, it was our original intention to include a department on rolls, and we did for a time handle the QRS rolls. However, there were problems encountered with rolls which we do not run into with other items such as sheet music, books, records, tapes, etc. We abandonned the handling of rolls ourselves for the time being, as there are others better equipped who make a specialty of it. However, we are only too glad to print any information about rolls which reaches us, with the proviso "Caveat emptor". We make the same proviso about any other material for sale which comes to our attention. Because of an unpleasant situation outlined in our January issue, we have to date received 4 letters from other suppliers assuring us of their honest intentions. We have had dealings ourselves with at least a dozen roll suppliers, and the only one we were not completely satisfied with was the same one that Bob Blay reported to us.

One of QRS Co.'s recent re-issues is their #595, Hooking Cow Blues, as played by J. Russell Robinson. They also have a dozen or so good ragtime rolls which we have reported from time to time.

Some months ago we mentionned the roll auctions held periodically by Music Treasure, Box 787, Kemah, Texas. On the two occasions we used their service we were completely satisfied both with the service and the quality of the roll supplied.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

The TV show with the MacInnes, originally planned for Dec. 26, last, and so reported by us, was postponed, and may now be seen April 24th on the CBC network.

John Ripley of Topeka, Kansas says the "further evidence that this present generation is not going to the dogs: instead of presenting the traditional bookish after dinner speaker at the upcoming annual meeting of the Kansas Library Association to be held in Wichita in May, the committee on arrangements has engaged Max Morath to talk briefly, and play at length on the subject of ragtime". (We dare say you had a hand in this deed, John. Ed)

This page, you will note, is numbered 18, which is the 18th page of our 1964 series newsletters. This may make it easier to refer back to certain items.

Comments on the comments dept.

On page 3, Vol 3, No. 1, we printed part of a letter from Bob Cantwell of New York, pertaining to the amount of conversation contained in certain records. We invited comments from the subscribers at large, and certainly got them, and at considerable length. None agrees with Bob Cantwell, but summing up, Dave Pope has this to say:

(please continue bottom of page 19)
SEE COMMENTS

SHEET MUSIC.

Spasm Rag, and Prairie Queen have been received back from the printers and have been mailed out to all those who ordered them. Sorry it took so long, but as you are aware these two numbers had to be completely autographed, and a first class job was done making them much more readable than would have been the case had we simply reproduced the manuscripts. We feel justifiably proud of these two fine numbers and urge you to send in your $2.00 now for them.

On the back covers of these two numbers we have reprinted the first pages of the following rags: Jack Frost, Ragtime Two-Step, Archie Scheu, 1906
African Pas', Ragtime Two-step, Maurice Kerwin, 1902
Rastus on Parade Kerry Mills
Florida Rag George Lowry, 1905

They're small, but perfectly legible, and will give you an idea of what the Society proposes as future reprints. These are not contained in Max Morath's excellent '100 best rags', and for the most part are fairly easy to play through. We can make these our next reprint programme if you want them. Please let us know.

TREEMONISHA.

Most of you have sent in your cheques as per our instructions in last month's newsletter, which is very encouraging. We have intentionally played down (in our opinion) the musical importance of this works as far as ragtime, as most of us understand it, is concerned. We are still short of the minimum number required, and if we are to proceed, we must ask those who originally signified their intention to participate to forward their cheques within the next 30 days. Rudy Voit of Skokie, Illinois sums it up this way: "In my mind Treemonisha occupies a place alongside works like James P. Johnson's Jasmine Concerto, Yamecraw, Harlem Symphony and 1 act opera (with libretto by Langston Hughes) De Organizer, and perhaps also the Spanish Suite and Whistlin Pete Rhapsody of Lucky Roberts. In each of these cases, a master of the shorter forms has tried his hand at an extended and more ambitious undertaking. I, for one, am not expecting a masterpiece. The project is important to me because I am sure it will fill in a few more pieces in the fascinating puzzle we call ragtime. If anyone has information concerning the availability of any of the other compositions mentionned above, I would greatly appreciate hearing from them." Rudy can be reached at 5101 Fargo Ave.

We recently had a request to locate sheet music for PETER PIPER, a two step Foxtrot. It is a piano solo, written circa 1910 - 1915, and had a front cover with a picture of a clownish individual in bright orange and black. We would appreciate hearing from anyone who has this number in his collection.

COMMENTS:

In rebuttal, we all like ragtime, much ragtime. One way or another, I've around 5 hours of ragtime on records, including the"inane" conversation. I wouldn't cut an inch to edit the conversation out. Morath approaches ragtime as a manifestation of the times from which it developed. To appreciate the music to the fullest, you must somehow get tuned to the spirit of existence in those times. As he says, you eat, live and breathe ragtime. The corny gags and anecdotes of the times are all part of the large picture of classic ragtime and its offshoots. Without the chatter, Max would be another expert ragtimer. With it, he is a traveller from another world and another time."

John Hill, Broomall, Penna. says, " Although I have about nine pages of comments concerning Robert Cantwell's critique of the Max Morath record, I will spare you the burden of reading them." John agrees that the record could contain more ragtime, but disagrees with the manner in which the comments are stated regarding "the tastes and intelligence of those of us who prefer the ragtime portions of the record". (COMMENTS continued, bottom of page 20.)

FROM OUR READERS.

"The work of the Society is extremely interesting and very valuable: each issue is read here with great attention, and there are certainly no complaints for the work that has been done. The copy of Harlem Rag is a bargain, to comment on my only purchase, and I am delighted to have it, and would have had no idea that it was available, or within the limits of a beginner's ability if you had not sent it on to me. The Tom Shea record is likewise a good beginning and it appears to be a valuable encouragement of a talent that ought to be encouraged. In respect to all these matters, I feel that things are better left in your hands without the interference or molestation of the membership.

"As for the general policy, most of the reprints are less interesting than the material you produce -- I mean the copies of newspaper or magazine articles or are already familiar, or, as in the case of the material taken from the English articles, is illuminating because of the mistakes or the unfamiliarity it reaveals. I am convinced that there is some hazard involved in accepting without question the general theory of the origins of ragtime that has been presented by Roy Carew and developed by Blesh & Janis, and I don't believe that it should be the guiding line in shaping the choices of the Ragtime Society in general (ie, with reference to the choice of the Tom Shea compositions, for instance). The history is a myth. The technical sophistication and originality of both Joplin and Scott indicate their mastery of European forms which they adopted without being dominated by-- the tragedy of all American composers and modern European composers too-- and the extraordinary delicacy and elegance of their music (especially in their waltzes and songs) makes the underworld origin of the form impossible. I do not think we ought to have a theory -- merely inquire and report and assemble all the material we can until a clearer picture emerges. Yours truly, Robert Cantwell.

On the subject of Wenrich Rags, Dave Pope says," I'd suggest that you print all those that are good and available. The comment certainly applies to the rags of all composers. There are, I'm sure, many good rags available aside from those in the Morath collection. I believe there are more quality rags than we rank-and-file Johnny-come-lately afficionadoes realize. Keep'em coming".

Brian Bulgin has this to say,"A point on the denigration of Wenrich in the January bulletin; all right, so some some of his stuff isn't of classic quality, but surely it's listenable and that surely is the criterion."

There are several worthwhile Wenrich Rags (although they do tend to follow a pattern) and it is the Society's intention to reprint some of them in the near future.

We heard from 3 people in Eugene, Oregon last week, that Max Morath had done one of his concerts at the University of Oregon, Feb. 23rd. Our Eugene correspondent, Teddie Beth Hardy has been keeping us well informed, and tells us that she rewrote the last theme of Primrose Rag. She has also written a new rag entitled 'The Good Years' which we understand will soon appear in print. We also understand that Max Morath will soon publish his 'Guide to Ragtime'.

COMMENTS: Teddie Beth Hardy further comments on Morath's record; " I'll admit, I'd prefer to have a record of Max playing without the audience, and perhaps without the conversation, but I think anyone who had seen one of Max's shows would never say the conversation is inane and that it has no place. Part of his tremendous skill is shown in his ability to integrate his gay and hilarious banter with his ability to play piano and his very appealing song renditions. After all, his record was made as a recording of his show and wasn't intended to be a recording of piano music only.

L.P. RECORDS.

R.S.R. #1, Classic & Modern Rags, by Tom Shea. We have recently received the second letter (amongst dozens of approval) which states in no uncertain terms (6 pages)"that this record is positively the WORST, positively the most sickening, and positively despicable all around. The music is in the junk category, and the style of playing in the itinerant category, etc., etc." In fact, this record is so bad that have only 32 left from our first pressing which is less than a three week supply. Plans are now underway for a second pressing as well as more releases by Tom Shea. Still $5.00 postpaid.

7" vs. 12" L.P.'s. The majority of those stating a preference lean towards a lower cost record...about 55%, which is admittedly a slim majority. Most of those commenting however, said that it made little difference, the music being the most important aspect. Part of our reasoning in the first place was to tie up less of our very limited capital in 7" as against 12". In spite of the fact that we may destroy the symmetry of some record collections, we have felt for some time that records of ragtime, and of player rolls in particular recorded slowly, are intended primarily for serious listening or study, and do not make the best type of 'background music'. We have been reminded that such outfits as Columbia tried 7 inchers and they flopped; that the 7" is not a standard size, etc., all of which arguments we were aware of. In spite of these and other points, we are still of the opinion that a 7" might best suit our particular (and peculiar) problems. From the best ofseveral 7", we might well produce one or two 12" L.P.'s. Brian Bulgin of Ludlow, U.K. seems to speak for most when he says, "My pocket would allow me to spend say $12 - 15 a year on such debauchery. As to whether 7" or 12", my only criterion would be as to which provides better value for money, and if they were as good as R.S.R. 1, I would buy them if they were square in shape."
We don't object to 12" records as such, but the amount of planning involved, the capital tied up, and the time required all told would seem to indicate that we might achieve more by putting out 7" series; which is why we put the question to you. We are not aiming for the mass market; we are catering, we feel to a very select group with discriminating tastes most of whom are in the process of learning. By this we mean that a good part of our following wants to learn about ragtime, or learn how to play it, or learm how it should be played, or was played, etc. When we produce an L.P. of piano rolls, it will not be at breakneck speed as has been the case many times in the past. If it boils down to putting 3 numbers per side played very fast, against 2 numbers per side played at a reasonable speed, we will choose the latter. Hence we will not appeal to that group which attends night clubs to hear speed exhibitions, and that of course is the larger group, or mass market. If we produce L.P.'s of live players,(which we also hope to do) we will choose numbers which are not generally as well known as Dill Pickles, 12th St, Original Rags, etc. We hope to give you something different. What is your opinion of the following ?

A. Four or five versions of Maple Leaf, all from rolls, including that played by Joplin.
B. Rolls of James Scott's Grace & Beauty, Ophelia, Ragtime Oriole, Evergreen, Efficiency, Kansas City
C. Rolls of Scott Joplin's Easy Winners, Wall Street, Magnetic Rag Heliotrope Bouquet, Rose Leaf, Fig Leaf.
D. Rolls of Joseph Lamb's Sensation Rag, American Beauty Rag, Excelsior. Marshall's Kinklets, Pryor's Coon Band Contest.
E. Rolls of the following: That Mysterious Rag, That Beautiful Rag, Invitation Rag, Creole Belles, Cum Bac Rag
F. Live renditions by amateur performers...ie,Tom Shea

G. Rolls of Blues, Later Ragtime (J. Russell Robinson), Early Jazz, etc.

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TONY JACKSON

By R. J. CAREW

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The following piece was one of a series of "New Orleans Recollections" by Roy Carew. It is typical of the many stories and anecdotes Roy tells of jazz music forty years ago. In talking with Roy or in reading his Recollections, you are soon struck by the fact that he makes no effort to jazz up a story with far-fetched embellishments. Speaking of an old time jazz musician who was inclined to fall into this practice, Roy once remarked, "There's a man with a coming memory." A retired government worker, Mr. Carew now lives in Washington, collects ragtime sheet music, plays it all on his grand piano. On the labels of some Jelly Roll Morton records, composer credit is shown as "Morton & Werac," the latter being Roy's business name.

In the early years of the present century there stood, at the downtown woods corner of Villere and Iberville Streets, in that part of New Orleans known as Storyville, a frame dwelling of the type descriptively called "camel-back." This name was applied to those houses which had a single story in front, but were of two stories in back. The house rested upon a brick foundation a few feet high, and four or five wooden steps led up to the front door, which faced on Iberville Street. On the glass portion of the door was painted the inscription "Gonzales, female cornetist." There was no yard in front, nor at the side, and the brick banquettes[1] extended right up to the side of the house. The old Villere Street car line ran past the side of the house, but few passengers got on or off in that neighborhood. It was not a gaudy or noisy neighborhood; the dance halls and flashy places were two or three blocks toward the river, nearer Basin Street.

One evening during the winter of 1904-1905, I was strolling aimlessly about downtown New Orleans, and in the course of time I found myself approaching the corner I have described. As I neared the front of the Gonzales establishment, I could hear the sound of piano playing with someone singing, which my ears told me was coming from the Villere side of the house. Always very fond of popular music, I immediately walked to the side of the house and got as close to the music as possible; with the banquette going right up to the side of the house, I found myself standing under one of the windows of what probably was Madam Gonzales' parlor, listening to the "Professor" playing and singing. That night is about thirty-eight years in the past now, but it is almost as clear in my memory as if it were last night. It was the most remarkable playing and singing I had ever heard; the songs were just some of the popular songs of that day and time, but the beat of the bass and the embellished treble of the piano told me at once that here was something new to me in playing. And the singing was just as distinctive. It was a man's voice of very good quality which rang true on every tone; a vibrant voice that took each note with easy precision; a happy voice that had at times a sort of wild earnestness to it. High notes, low notes, fast or slow,—the singer executed them all perfectly, blending them into a perfect performance with the remarkable piano style.

As I stood there, I noticed another listener standing on the edge of the sidewalk a little ways away. I never got to know the man, but I will never forget our very short conversation, "Who in the world is that?" I asked, indicating the unseen player, as I stepped over to him. "Tony Jackson," he replied. "He knows a thousand songs."

Most of the modern jazz hounds probably never heard of Tony Jackson, but he was one of the pioneering giants of that style of playing. Before most of the modern notables were born, players like Tony Jackson and Jelly Roll Morton were slapping hot numbers right and left off the keyboard. Maybe Tony wasn't as good as I think he was. But as I sit at the radio or phonograph and listen to those who are touted as today's best, I am reassured and convinced he was. And if one of the moderns knocks out a tune that sounds as good as Tony, all I need to say to myself is "Now let me hear him *sing* one."

[1] New Orleans for sidewalk.